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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION REPORT - Middle East - U.S. Policy
- Hamas Iran Moussaoui Trial
PARIS - Thursday, May 04, 2006

(A) SUBJECTS COVERED IN TODAY'S REPORT:

Middle East - U.S. Policy - Hamas
Iran
Moussaoui Trial

B) SUMMARY OF COVERAGE:

The glossy weekly magazine Paris Match features a four-page spread on Ambassador and Mrs. Stapleton. The report includes an extensive interview with Ambassador Stapleton largely devoted to French-American relations. Mrs. Stapleton's interview touches on France's cultural wealth.

As the Clearstream scandal grows, the story is increasingly taking up entire front pages: "Turbulence" headlines Le Figaro next to a picture of Villepin; "Villepin: Obvious Lies" headlines Liberation. A word which the editorial in right-of-center Le Figaro reiterates about Villepin: "Even if the whole thing is a huge manipulation, why did he lie." In weekly Le Point Franz-Olivier Giesbert pens an op-ed entitled "The Specter of Watergate" in which he literally calls Villepin a liar: "Can the Prime Minister deny he never said to me and others that 'Sarkozy is finished. If the press does its job, he will not survive this affair.?' Le Monde, Le Figaro and France 2 television this morning report on General Rondot's personal notes taken after his meeting with PM Villepin on January 9, 2004 which mentions Villepin's request to look into "the role of the Americans - support given to Sarkozy." Le Parisien's front page is devoted to: "The Clearstream Affair: The French Disoriented" and publishes the results of a poll showing that 43% of respondents consider the situation to be serious; 33% want Villepin to resign; but 66% are against anticipated presidential elections. PM Villepin was expected to give a press conference this morning.

Today's other major front-page story is the verdict in the Moussaoui trial: "Moussaoui Escapes Death Sentence," while Le Figaro and Le Parisien title: "Moussaoui condemned to Life." The news, widely reported on the electronic media as of last evening, noted that for lack of a unanimous vote, life in prison was the final verdict. In one report in Liberation, Pascal Riche comments: "In the end, Moussaoui was tried for what he did, not what he said." (See Part C) The draft resolution put forward at the UNSC by the U.S., France and Great Britain in favor of sanctions against Iran is another leading international story. (See Part C) Several op-eds are devoted to dealing with the Middle East, Hamas and Islamists in general. (See Part C)

(C) SUPPORTING TEXT/BLOCK QUOTES:

Middle East - U.S. Policy - Hamas

"Bush's Failure in the Middle East"
Thierry de Montbrial of IFRI in left-of-center Le Monde (05/04): "George W. Bush's results in the Middle East, the most important region in international politics, are disastrous. Iraq is on the verge of civil war, the new Prime Minister's task appears Herculean and the economic and social situation is calamitous. Radicalization in the Middle East in general is on the rise as seen with the democratic elections in Egypt or in the Palestinian territories. Tension between the U.S. and Iran is at a 'zenith' while in the Palestinian territories, the tendency is towards the policy of separation put forth by Ariel Sharon, a unilateralist stance, which the Bush Administration has continually supported. Only a more balanced attitude on the part of the U.S. could give the Road Map another chance to succeed. As regards Iran, if the U.S. stopped focusing on toppling the Mullahs' regime and undertook a real dialogue with Teheran starting with the array of topics that are of common interest, it would set the stage for a new and positive dynamic. The EU, for its part, cannot afford to let its guard down on the subject of the Middle East and give in to the temptation to fall in

step behind the U.S."

"Bernard Lewis and the West's Weakness in the Face of Islam"

Philippe Gelie comments on a round table with Princeton University Professor Bernard Lewis, who coined the phrase 'clash between civilizations,' in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/04): "Lewis does not believe that Islam will be controlled by Islamists. On the contrary, he believes that democratic forces are progressing in the Muslim world. But he denounces the West's 'weaknesses' as much as the violent currents, which can be seen in the Islamic world. Lewis, who approved the war in Iraq, acknowledges that the U.S. 'underestimated its ability to trigger defeat from victory.' Lewis speaks in favor of destroying the Iraqi insurrection, 'totally. This is not something that can be done partially.' The same goes for Hamas."

"Hamas Seeking Contacts in Europe"

Georges Malbrunot in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/04): "Paris refused visa requests to Hamas representatives who nevertheless have discreet dealings with Sweden and Spain. The contact certain EU countries have with Hamas points to the dichotomy between the official line and reality. FM Douste-Blazy has underscored that France 'has no relationship' with Hamas, but while this may be the case for the Ministry, the intelligence services would like to establish ties: 'When politicians do not talk to each other, it is our role to deal behind the scenes' says an intelligence official. Someone will eventually have to make the first step to grant Hamas some political credibility. and deal with the hypocrisy of the situation."

Iran

"UNSC Divided in Face of Iran"

Maurin Picard in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/04): "The U.S., France and Great Britain have failed to convince Moscow and Beijing to join them in their initiative against Tehran. Negotiations will resume on May 8. Russia and China reject the inclusion in the resolution of any mention of sanctions and the use of force as last resort. In Paris, a Russian diplomat clearly stated that Moscow does not want the mention of a 'threat to peace and to international security' adding there is no proof that Teheran wants to build the bomb. Moscow feels that western determination would 'play into the hands' of Iran's ultra-conservative wing. But the Americans disagree, and are satisfied to have finally brought Iran before the UNSC. Says Ambassador Bolton: 'The U.S. would be satisfied with Russia and China abstaining.' During Merkel's meeting with President Bush she hoped to convince him to take a 'methodical' approach in order not to alienate his allies as was the case in 2003 with Iraq."

"Machiavelli in Iran"

Alexandre Adler in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/04): "The West should make concessions to Iran, more specifically it should allow it to continue its nuclear program, which would in turn hasten the emergence of trends oriented toward negotiation. Any other solution could only lead to a major clash whose first effect would be to succeed where Ossama Bin Laden has for the moment failed: in establishing a united political Islamic front where the Shiite-Sunni cleavage, however exacerbated in Iraq, Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, would be heaped onto the West's back. By discretely leaving the door half-open, Ahmadinejad would be weakened, finally appearing as the principal obstacle, and no longer the solution, to the construction of a regional hegemonic Iran."

Moussaoui Trial

"Moussaoui Escapes Death Sentence"

Guillemette Faure in right-of-center Le Figaro (05/04): "The Federal Court of Alexandria has respected its own tradition of never having pronounced a death sentence. But the verdict is in keeping with U.S. jurisprudence which reserves capital punishment for direct perpetrators of a crime and spares accomplices. In sparing his life, the jury has tried to keep Moussaoui from turning into an expiatory victim. While this is a victory for the defense, it is of little consolation to the accused. who was nevertheless the source of the proof used to accuse him. But after seven weeks of trial, many questions remain unanswered, such as why was he so keen to take quickie flying lessons and why did he deposit the 14,000 dollars he received from Ramzi Bin al-Shibh, the 'treasurer' of the 9/11 attacks?"

"Life for Moussaoui"

Laurent Mauriac in left-of-center Liberation (05/04): "Seen from the outside, the jury's verdict is logical: Moussaoui was in jail when the 9/11 attacks occurred. Yet seen from inside the courtroom, the death penalty was far from impossible. Moussaoui's lies, had, according to testimony, 'directly' caused the death of at least 3000 people. But the trial often appeared to be more than just Moussaoui's trial. The verdict saves the French government from an

issue of contention with the U.S. over the death penalty. Last evening, France's Justice Minister acknowledged the verdict of 'an independent court.' The French association of trial lawyers has for its part saluted the verdict as 'a victory against the death penalty.'" STAPLETON